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General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

9th meeting
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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Participation of non-governmental organizations in the debate in the plenary of the twenty-third special session

The President: Members will recall that in its decision 54/466 of 15 March 2000 the General Assembly decided that non-governmental organizations would be requested to select spokespersons among themselves and provide the list thereof to the President of the General Assembly. The Assembly further requested the President of the Assembly to present the list of selected non-governmental organizations to Member States for approval and to ensure that such a selection was made on an equal and transparent basis, taking into account the geographical representation and diversity of non-governmental organizations.

I should like to inform members that the President of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations has communicated to me a list of five selected non-governmental organizations, all in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. Their representatives would make statements in the debate in plenary meeting of the special session on behalf of the regional constituencies, including the regional caucuses for Beijing +5.

The five selected non-governmental organizations are the following: Women in Law and Development in Africa; Mahila Dakshata Samiti; the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women; Centro de la Mujer Peruana "Flora Tristán"; and the Alliance for Arab Women.

If there is no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees that representatives from the five selected non-governmental organizations may make statements in the debate in plenary meeting of the special session?

It was so decided.

The President: Those five organizations will therefore be added to the end of the list of speakers, and their statements will be limited to five minutes.

Agenda items 8 and 9 *(continued)*

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Makbule Çeço, Deputy Prime Minister of Albania.

Mrs. Çeço (Albania) (*spoke in French*): Albania has come to this important event with more experience than ever before in the work for women's emancipation. In the past five years, the women's movement has worked vigorously and positively, and has thus had a favourable impact on women's awareness of their rights in society and within the

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family, as well as on their attitudes to the practical fulfilment of those rights.

We have also seen a growing awareness among the public in general, thanks to the efforts of women to confront present-day problems with dignity. In this context, we should mention the interest shown and the measures taken by the State of Albania. In keeping with requirements of the Beijing Platform for Action, a new institutional mechanism has been established — a governmental structure at a higher level than its equivalent in 1995, so as to accord it greater importance.

We have also established a parliamentary subcommittee for young people and women, which is playing an active role in the promotion and elaboration of long-term policies in this area. The Albanian Government today has a clearer vision of the role and importance of the equal participation of women and men in all areas of political, economic and social life.

Using the Beijing Platform as a reference point for its work, the Albanian Government has adopted and implemented four main objectives: in decision-making, we are seeking to ensure equality of opportunity; in the economic sphere, priority is being given to the promotion of employment and the eradication of poverty; with regard to social issues, priority is being given to the prevention of violence against women; and in health, priority is being given to access to medical services and family planning.

With regard to the participation of women in positions of authority, the figures show an increase as compared with the start of the transitional period in Albania, but their representation at all levels in positions of power is still very low. However, there is growing pressure from women's groups and civil society to achieve equality of opportunity in the decision-making process. Public opinion is becoming increasingly aware of and confident in the fact that women are worthy of standing side-by-side with men and that they are capable of succeeding.

The Constitution adopted in November 1998 guarantees equal political, economic and social rights for both sexes. The Constitution has opened up the way for improvements in all our legislation, so that the legislative framework can be brought into line with the basic Beijing document. Thus, important progress has been made with the preparation of new laws such as the civil code, the code of civil procedure, the penal code and the labour code. The family code is now being drafted.

Since 1991, other legislative reforms relating to the rights of women have been undertaken. I should like to refer to the law allowing for the interruption of involuntary pregnancy and the right of women to ask for divorce, as well as the right to the fair distribution of common property following divorce. Thus, it is not enough to have up-to-date legislation; such legislation must be implemented.

The National Committee for women and the family and non-governmental organizations are now working to inform women of their rights so as to make them aware of the need to ensure that the law is applied. Violence against women continues to be a sensitive issue in our country, as elsewhere in the world. Such violence is everywhere, within the family and in society, and takes the form of social, psychological and physical violence, affecting various age groups. Such violence is rarely punished by the courts; awareness in this area leaves something to be desired.

One of our Government's priorities is to empower women economically. In the Balkans, the Stability Pact has already been institutionalized. Albanian women are participating actively in it with a view to strengthening their cooperation with other women of the region towards the creation of a culture of peace and understanding.

The active role of international agencies dealing with women's issues remains necessary in support of the movement for equal opportunities and is particularly indispensable to countries that, like mine, are going through a difficult social transition and democracy-building. The role and participation of women and respect for their rights are sine qua non in this process.

In Albania today, civil society and governmental and non-governmental organizations are raising awareness throughout society of the need for equal opportunities. In this emancipation process, there are only winners. I wish the Assembly every success in achieving victory for equal opportunity.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Royal Highness princess Basma Bint Talal, head of the Jordanian National Commission for Women.

Princess Basma (Jordan): I come from the Arab region, proud of its heritage and culture, rooted in its traditions, which reflect the three great monotheistic religions. It is in this spirit that I have chosen to convey the message of my country, Jordan.

On behalf of the Jordanian delegation, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to Mr. Kofi Annan for his continued support and commitment to the realization of a global agenda for women and also to the Director and staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women for their diligent work in setting the stage for this special session.

The dialogue and debate that have taken place during the last few days are a vibrant reflection of the diversity of hopes and concerns regarding the progress of women, from all regional perspectives. On the final day of this special session, I hope that the outcome will capture the richness of this diversity and strengthen the goal of gender equality, development and peace.

As in many developing countries, economic and political considerations have been major factors in effecting change in Jordan. This has been coupled with the process of liberalization and consensus-building, which has resulted in the greater empowerment and involvement of everyday citizens in Jordan's civic life, contributing to increased stability and institutionalization.

To fully reflect the constitutional equality granted to all Jordanians and to ensure the institutionalization of efforts to improve women's status, the Jordanian National Commission for Women has been mandated by the Government to define general policies related to women, to propose laws as well as amendments to legislation which will remove discrimination against women and to follow up on the implementation of these measures.

The process itself has been strengthened through a high level of political will. His Majesty the late King Hussein called for an end to the violations of women's fundamental rights and his successor, King Abdullah II, is determined to fulfil this goal.

This commitment has been coupled with a greater policy adherence by the Government to take special measures to speed up the equality process. Most notably, the Economic and Social Development Plan for 1999-2003 has been drafted for the first time with a gender perspective, ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in all sectors of the Plan. While aiming to bridge the gender gap in the various social and economic fields and to prevent all forms of discrimination and violence against women, the Plan gives equal weight to the role of men and women in sustainable development. Through this approach, Jordan has translated the principal strategy of gender mainstreaming, which is strongly endorsed by the Platform for Action, into its own policies.

A tangible improvement has also taken place in women's participation in political and public life. Appointments to higher posts in the executive, the judiciary and the senate all reflect women's political will and ability to reach higher decision-making positions. A realization of the importance of engaging parliamentarians in working towards women's empowerment is also growing.

The process of updating Jordan's National Strategy for Women has been recently launched. The Strategy takes into consideration new developments, such as Jordan's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as the outcomes of the special session.

While there are those who believe that we have only made a small impact in promoting the changes that we aimed for in Beijing, we should also remember that five years is not a long time-frame in which to achieve fundamental changes. While legal reform and the adoption of new policies are prerequisites for gender equality, our experience has shown us that it is equally essential to ensure that societal understanding and acceptance of change be addressed concurrently.

As a developing country, Jordan is all the more aware of the impact that the intensifying invasion of a global culture is having on people at the local level. While women's advancement is a globally accepted goal, it should also be recognized that prevailing conditions at the local level, whether social, political or economic, have a direct bearing on the pace at which this process evolves. Indeed, within this context, the diversity of our cultures, religions and interests are factors that must be given due consideration in international meetings such as this one. For, in essence, it is through this kind of responsiveness that we will secure gains that we have achieved since Beijing and ensure that the process which has been set in motion

will continue to gather momentum. Rather than diminishing our indigenous values and traditions, we in Jordan, as in many developing countries, would like to see a global vision that can foster harmony instead of discord and create an enabling climate for our national initiatives to flourish.

May the outcome of our deliberations strengthen our resolve to ensure that all women can play an equal role in shaping the future of our world.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Djamel Ould Abbas, Minister for National Solidarity of Nigeria.

Mr. Ould Abbas (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to express my delegation's pleasure at seeing you, Sir, presiding over this special session of the General Assembly devoted to the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" and to convey our sincere gratitude for the commitment and devotion with which you have guided our work.

While international meetings have been held regularly over the past decade and have emitted declarations and programmes of action, the Beijing Conference constituted a turning point in the approach to the main problems of women and an essential breakthrough in raising awareness of the need for international solidarity to deal with the challenges facing women, as individuals and pillars of society. It is clear that the role of women remains the reference point for evaluating the willingness and determination of our countries, individually or collectively, to face all the challenges involved in making progress.

That Conference, held five years ago, allowed for the drafting of a cohesive and ambitious programme of action to enshrine the essential role of women in development, to empower them and to integrate efficiently the imperative of equality between the sexes into all development processes, while respecting social values and national cultures.

We are meeting today in New York in order to assess five years of efforts in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. This assessment should be a frank diagnosis, free of complacency about the ground covered and the obstacles overcome on the way to the full and scrupulous implementation of the commitments undertaken by our Governments.

In this context, although important progress has been made, which we should welcome, particularly in the areas of health, education, literacy and school attendance of girls, it must be noted that we have not been able to achieve the objectives set in a number of sectors, often due to the limited financial resources allocated to social development programmes. What other conclusion could we reach, when we know that 1.5 billion people survive on $1 or less per day, a majority of whom are women, and nearly 600 million women cannot read or write at a time when new telecommunication technologies are opening up incredible horizons of emancipation for humanity?

These few statistics adequately attest to the obstacles and burdens that continue to fundamentally thwart change in the status of women. They remind us that the battle is far from being won; in a number of cases there has even been regression, particularly in the developing countries, where the political will of States alone, which is nevertheless real, is not sufficient to overcome the challenges of advancing the role and position of women in society. This is particularly serious and acute in Africa, where the deterioration of living conditions, aggravated by various scourges, primarily affects women and other vulnerable groups of society.

At Beijing we undertook together global commitments expressing a common will to take collective measures to improve the status of women and to facilitate their integration into the development process.

In spite of all the constraints, it can be stated that the developing world has honourably met, to a great extent, its domestic responsibilities in the area concerning us today. It can also be stated that the tremendous mobilization of women has crucially contributed to the successful efforts in this regard at the national and the international levels.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay a tribute to all the women, and particularly to the African women, who recently committed themselves again, following their meeting at Algiers in November 1999, to reaffirm, with faith and determination, their aspirations for themselves, their respective societies and their continents.

These efforts, however, cannot truly succeed without the financial resources necessary to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. Therefore, the donor

community must assume the responsibility undertaken at the World Summit for Social Development to accelerate African development and the development of the least developed countries, and to support more firmly and resolutely the African continent in general and African women in particular.

I wish also to take this opportunity to give a brief survey of the results achieved in my country, Algeria, in relation to the Beijing Platform for Action. The implementation of this programme at the national level has been carried out through, first, a process of revising family law in order to further address women's aspirations; second, increasing school attendance for girls, which exceeds 80 per cent for ages six through fifteen and approaches 100 per cent for six-year-olds, while girl-boy parity has been achieved in secondary and advanced education, thanks to the opening of schools in the most remote areas, and there has been an increase in school cafeterias and boarding schools, the development of school transportation and the allocation of student grants; third, improved access to reproductive health services; fourth, wider use of birth control, which involves more than half of all couples; fifth, greater maternity care, leading to an increase in the rate of assisted childbirth to 79 per cent; sixth, the improvement of infant and child health through strengthening prevention programmes, particularly vaccination programmes; seventh, greater integration of women into the workforce, through the preservation of female employment and the creation of new opportunities, despite the economic crisis that has resulted in expanding pockets of poverty and slower job creation; eighth, the advancement of women's participation in the decision-making process and in administration, through the accession of a significant number of women to higher State posts, and in the political arena, where we have two presidents and several vice-presidents of political parties; ninth, the development of the movement of women's associations and the growing involvement of women in humanitarian organizations; and finally, the adoption of affirmative action provisions favouring Algerian women to allow them to catch up with men.

It is undeniable that Algeria's adherence to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1996 and its subsequent implementation have had a considerable impact on the emancipation process of Algerian women and have certainly helped the authorities to better define the problems and inadequacies linked to the status of women, including in the legal and regulatory spheres.

Finally, the terrorist violence that Algerian society as a whole has often experienced has particularly affected the physical integrity and moral dignity of women. The various forms of suffering that terrorism has inflicted on women are very serious. With the elimination of the phenomenon of terrorism, now limited to certain pockets, and real attention by the public authorities to victims of terrorism, this problem that has so cruelly affected Algerian women is gradually disappearing.

Although the crisis situation experienced by the country has been painful, it has opened the way to a new social balance based on the greater integration of women. A new dynamic involving women more in the various decision-making processes and therefore in the definition of policies, particularly in sectors that had been completely closed to them, was initiated by the President of the Republic, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who officially and publicly expressed his firm desire to give women their rightful place in society.

Thus, constructive measures establishing priorities for women are envisaged in order to consolidate specific provisions that have already been implemented with regard to women's participation in public life. At the same time, this dynamic of advancing the status of women is aimed at the emergence of a system of values based primarily on a spirit of solidarity, equity, social justice and peace, of which women are the bearers.

The achievement of some goals of the Platform for Action should not allow us to forget that we still have a long way to go. The State's political will and the commitment of Algerian society to strengthen the work accomplished for women remain firm and full. Like other countries, Algeria would like once again to solemnly reaffirm its adherence to the Beijing Platform for Action and its determination to implement it fully.

Finally, I wish to convey a message to all the world's representatives on behalf of Algerian women, who have suffered under ten years of terrorism.

> "We have experienced murders of well-known women — journalists, teachers, doctors and intellectuals. But it was rural women — the women who lived in the mountains -- who

resisted the most. We pay a resounding homage to all Algerian women. It is thanks to them that terrorism has been vanquished."

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aminata Tall, Minister for Family Affairs and National Solidarity of Senegal.

Mrs. Tall (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is pleased with the holding of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to evaluate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to find new approaches to better ensure the implementation and protection of the fundamental rights of women. In this regard, this session seeks to be self-critical, critical and forward-looking. In fact, the challenges we must take up together are numerous, and we must face them in a spirit of cooperation and effective solidarity through dialogue, the exchange of experiences and the sharing of good practices, as has been very correctly underlined in the Luxembourg declaration, adopted in February 2000 by the first Conference of Women of La Francophonie.

In this context, it is important to emphasize the current immediacy and relevancy of the 12 critical areas of concern singled out by the Beijing Platform for Action by giving sustained attention to questions relating to women's access to information and communications technologies, their role in decision-making, the promotion of equality between the sexes, violence against women, traditional practices that have a great effect on the health of women and girls and, finally, the struggle against the high rate of maternal mortality, the HIV/AIDS virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. But one of the major challenges continues to be the fight against poverty and the feminization of poverty, which must be addressed by creating conditions that will enable poor women in rural and urban areas to have access to basic social services, credit, property and productive resources. I am firm in my conviction that the key to the liberation of women continues to be education and training. The World Forum on Education for All, held in my country last month, placed particular emphasis on this fundamental issue, which ought to be at the centre of our national policies.

While some progress has been made in the areas I have mentioned, five years after Beijing that progress is still not enough, given the numerous and complex obstacles that exist. Within the framework of its national action plan for women for the period 1997-2000, my country — Senegal — has been implementing projects and programmes to strengthen the economic and financial capacities of women and their participation in the decision-making process by applying the commitments agreed in the Dakar African Platform and the Beijing Platform for Action.

It is in this same spirit that we accord high priority to the schooling of girls. The rate of school attendance for girls, which in 1994 was only 30 per cent, will reach 62 per cent in the 2000-2001 school year.

We attach the same importance to the issue of women's reproductive health. Among other things, my country is now implementing national legislation adopted in January 1999 that, among other things, punishes excision, domestic violence, rape, paedophilia and sexual harassment. In addition, we have ratified without any reservation almost all the legal instruments relating to human rights. I am proud to announce from this rostrum that Senegal is one of only two countries to have deposited, on 26 May 2000, its instrument of ratification for the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. I should also add that my Government will shortly establish a national monitoring office for the rights of women and girls that will function as an institution to analyse, monitor and follow up the observance of those rights.

The head of State of Senegal, His Excellency Maître Abdoulaye Wade, makes the promotion and protection of the rights of women a major priority of his Government programme as a way to eradicate poverty in all its forms. In my capacity as Minister for Family Affairs and National Solidarity, I would like to solemnly reaffirm here Senegal's determination to pursue the implementation of the commitments agreed upon by the international community at Beijing and to translate into concrete actions the decisions and recommendations that emerge from this session. We shall do this in constant cooperation and consultation with non-governmental organizations and all interested actors in both civil society and the private sector.

I need also to underscore that within this framework of dynamic partnership we women of Africa and developing countries, while knowing full well how to rely on our own strengths and abilities, today need more than ever before greater solidarity

from the international community and increased support from the United Nations system. That solidarity and support are all the more necessary due to the downward trend in official development assistance, the unbearable debt burden and the numerous tariff and non-tariff barriers that leave few opportunities for our countries in a world where globalization had become the rule.

I would like to conclude by offering the hope that this special session in New York will provide a new starting point and open up new prospects for the women of the world to bring about the emergence of a more human society, one more concerned about gender equality — a society of solidarity and justice — in a word, a society of democracy, peace and development for all.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Rashida Yoosuf, Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Security of Maldives.

Ms. Yoosuf (Maldives): It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to participate in this special session of the General Assembly, entitled, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". I thank the United Nations for making it possible to hold a global consultation on the progress we have made and the challenges we still have to face since the holding of the Beijing Conference.

In the five years since Beijing, Maldives has made progress in the critical areas outlined in the Platform for Action. Our achievements would not have been possible had it not been for the commitment of the Government to gender equality in our society. Like most other countries, Maldives has had to face a number of constraints in working towards the Platform goals. Age-old beliefs and practices that perpetuate injustices have continued to give women a subordinate status. Women still spend a major part of their time engaged in domestic and childcare responsibilities. However, thanks to the unrelenting efforts of the Government, with the active collaboration of non-governmental organizations, to raise gender-awareness among the people, attitudes and perceptions they have long harboured are slowly changing.

Let me know highlight some of the achievements we have made and constraints we have had to face in realizing the Platform for Action. Last year the Government announced its national vision for the year 2020. The vision statement says that gender equality will be a reality by the year 2020, with active participation of both women and men in political, social and economic activities on an equal footing.

As one of the greatest obstacles to empowering women is the near absence of structures and resources to broaden women's economic opportunities and independence, special credit schemes have been launched to provide women with seed money to increase their long-term borrowing power. And 25 per cent of loans under all other development loan schemes are being utilized by women, indicating the high demand for economic resources. Efforts are being made to encourage women to enter non-traditional work areas, while awareness is also being created about the importance of greater participation by men in domestic and family life. These measures have increased women's self-reliance and independence, whilst also strengthening the family as a unit.

The report resulting from a poverty and vulnerability assessment conducted in 1998 in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), states that the women of the Maldives can be considered as among the most emancipated in the Islamic world and in the South Asian region. Their position can be further strengthened by more concerted efforts to create productive employment, especially in the atolls. Furthermore, that study concluded that there were no significant differences in the development priorities of men and women in the Maldives.

The Maldives has attained 98 per cent functional literacy. But we are not complacent about this. Much needs to be done, particularly in raising the level of education in the outer atolls. Equal opportunities are given to boys and to girls at all levels of education. There is parity in primary and secondary school enrolment, which stands at 49 per cent girls and 51 per cent boys. However, higher secondary and tertiary enrolment figures show a considerable decrease in the number of girls, presumably because of a lack of mobility for girls, as higher secondary and tertiary education are available only in the capital island and abroad respectively.

In the field of health too, gains have been made. Life expectancy at birth in 1998 was 71 years, and has been higher for women than for men since 1995. Maternal mortality too has come down, from 202 to 158 per 100,000. Public awareness regarding healthy

living, with special emphasis on reproductive health and the reproductive rights of women, has increased. A baseline survey done in 1999 indicates a 92 per cent awareness with respect to HIV/AIDS. The survey also reveals that there has been a steady increase in the contraceptive prevalence rate, from 17 per cent in 1995 to 23 per cent in 1999. Yet frequent divorce and multiple marriage are of great concern, as they not only favour the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases but also aggravate women's social and economic insecurity.

Maldives is not immune to the growing menace of violence against women. Therefore, action is being taken to unveil the extent of the problem, and the mass media are being used to increase awareness of it. A major drawback in assessing the extent of the problem in our society is that it is not visible, due mainly to the social stigma suffered by victims of abuse. We believe that what has been revealed thus far is but the tip of the iceberg. Although an adequate institutional mechanism has not yet been developed to address violence, all cases reported are dealt with in accordance with the law. We need to do much more to eliminate violence against women and to promote and protect the human rights of women. One important element would be to further sensitize medical, legal and police personnel so that timely action can be taken.

In the past three years, particular importance has been given to increasing the political awareness and legal literacy of women. Numerous workshops have been held, and other modes of disseminating information are being used to promote the active participation of women in decision-making and to increase their awareness of their civil rights. The results have been positive. In the 1999 parliamentary elections, the number of female candidates increased more than it ever had before. The current composition of the People's Majlis includes 10 per cent women members, in comparison to 6 per cent in the previous Majlis. More women are being appointed as decision makers in the Government. Similarly, at the island level, women are encouraged to assume leadership positions. This year, two women were appointed as island chiefs, for the first time in Maldivian history. Other such appointments are under consideration. Unlike before, women are now given formal training so that they can develop management skills necessary for assuming leadership.

Another significant step forward worthy of mention is a new family bill, which is now being debated in the People's Majlis. The bill is aimed at, among other things, protecting the rights of women and enhancing their status, especially within the family, in the true spirit of Islam. These policy guidelines and legislation will further strengthen efforts made by the Government and by non-governmental organizations working for the advancement of women. However, resource constraints, both budgetary and relating to trained personnel, have remained our biggest disadvantage.

The shortage of resources has disabled us in the area of analysing, planning and monitoring gender-related issues. Nevertheless, the Government, in its endeavour to mainstream gender using the Commonwealth approach of gender management systems, has listed this as a national priority for the year 2000.

I am happy to say that gender concerns are better covered in the recently undertaken constitutional and legislative reforms. The revised citizenship law ensures automatic citizenship to children borne by Maldivian women married to foreign nationals, while it had favoured men earlier. In addition, government employees are now entitled to a 60-day maternity leave, in comparison to the 45 days they were given before. Paternity leave has also been extended. Women can also get one year of unpaid leave to look after their infant children and can then return to their positions at work. Furthermore, women can take a break from work daily for breastfeeding their children.

The media too are becoming more gender sensitive, although progress is slow. Improvements have been made in the portrayal of women. Wider coverage is being given to gender issues, and the media have contributed positively to educating the public on the adverse effects of gender-based violence.

Before concluding, I would like to acknowledge the role of the Commonwealth in advocating gender equality. The update to the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, which was endorsed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in November 1999, is a guiding light parallel to the Beijing Platform for Action. It highlights 15 critical areas of concern, of which gender mainstreaming, gender and politics, gender and conflict

resolution, gender integration into government budgets and women's human rights are given priority.

Although progress has been made in reducing gender gaps and raising the status of women in the Maldives, much remains to be done. Change in the perceptions of men and women on gender roles is central to everything. Stronger political will, policies, processes and partnerships to facilitate gender mainstreaming are equally important. Of course, the need for resources cannot be overemphasized.

In conclusion, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the various United Nations agencies that continue to support the Maldives in our efforts to empower women. It is my hope that the international community will renew its commitment to support our efforts to overcome the many challenges ahead.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Alba Tejada de Rolla, Minister for Youth, Women, Childhood and the Family of Panama.

Ms. Tejada de Rolla (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Panama is entering the twenty-first century with conditions favouring the State's political will for having equality between women and men. Within the framework of this process, the Government, presided over by Her Excellency Mrs. Mireya Moscoso Rodríguez, the first woman President of our country and today the only one in the American continent, undoubtedly is one of the most significant expressions of our progress.

Based on an objective assessment of our progress and obstacles in the 12 areas of special concern, we have chosen those that demonstrate the most relevant achievements.

The different commitments that our country has taken up at the international and regional levels with respect to women's human rights serve as the basis for a legal framework that legitimizes and supports the implementation of public policies for gender equality. Standards such as the prohibition and penalizing of physical and psychological violence in families and sexual harassment in the public and private sector workplaces are emphasized. Others have prohibited penalties for young women students who become pregnant and have established the Ministry of Youth, Women, Childhood and the Family, and the Equal Opportunity Law for Women.

Other important legal instruments are the laws for reform of voluntary insurance of the social security system to include individuals dedicated to the care of their families, equal opportunities for disabled persons, and the elimination of sexist language from school books. It is also important to point out that a gender committee has been created in the judicial academy, which through training programmes for judicial and law enforcement officers promotes the inclusion of the gender perspective.

In light of the serious problem of violence against women, various strategies have been adopted in order to comply with the commitments agreed on in the Inter-American Convention of Belem do Pará, which supports approval of the law on intra-family violence and mistreatment of minors. In the case of family violence, we have created special public prosecutor offices, awareness and training programmes for administrative, police and judicial authorities, opened the first shelter for victims, and strengthened the national network on violence against women and the family.

In the area of health, we have made important breakthroughs in integral health standards for the population and the environment; new models for family, community and environmental care with a humane ecological focus; technical and administrative norms in the comprehensive women's health programme and the programme called Women, Health and Development; the national plan for sexual and reproductive health; and bases for implementing the national system for epidemiological surveillance. Other breakthroughs are municipal committees for the prevention of early pregnancy and centres to take care of adolescents.

Women's participation in the political, social and economic spheres reflects an increase in positions of power and decision-making. Today, two of the most important judgeships of our country are held by women: the presidency of the Republic and the Supreme Court of Justice. Furthermore, a woman is the Vice-President of the Legislative Assembly at present. Likewise, there is growing representation in other important positions, such as legislators, ministers, vice-ministers and directors.

All of this has happened within the framework of establishing a 30 per cent women's electoral quota, the approval of a decree that indicates recommendations so

that political parties may include measures for nominating candidates, and the implementation of the project for the empowerment and participation of citizens in the programme for promoting equal opportunity in Panama.

The setting up of the National Women's Council and the National Directorate for Women, which are both attached to the Ministry of Youth, Women, Children and the Family, is a step towards the institutionalization of the gender perspective. These organs have become the core of national energy to implement the Platform for Action and the ideal mechanism to coordinate the plan of action of women and development proposed by the women's movement. In order to support this task, 17 sectoral mechanisms have been created so that women can advance in various government entities. In the area of training and education, the participation of women compared to men is growing every year. There has been a great push to succeed in academic, technical and professional training. To continue promoting this process we are implementing an education project without sex discrimination.

Following the lines of Beijing, we are still facing many obstacles in the areas of poverty, the economy, education and training, mass media, the environment and the girl child.

We endorse the pact on women and development between the women's movement and the State as part of our social agenda. We have taken up the commitment to comply with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Penalize and Eradicate Violence against Women; the implementation of laws and other legal provisions at the national and international level, contributing to full democracy in the country and ensuring the participation of women in all of the decision-making processes at the individual and collective levels; the development of training programmes for women from indigenous communities in the area of health, based on respect for their cultures and traditions; the implementation of the national plan for sexual reproductive health; and preparation of a plan on violence against women.

The general assessment has enabled us to identify and concentrate on qualitative changes which, in turn, will allow us to pinpoint areas of progress, reversals, deficiencies and challenges that are not always easy to recognize when considering cultural change.

It is not simply a matter of designing mechanisms to achieve equality; the process of setting them up should also become a way of helping to redefine traditional relations between men and women. This implies the increased involvement and consistent participation and organization of women in many different areas.

Our political will within the ongoing dialogue that is taking place among women and their organizations has become stronger. This relationship has become, today more than ever before, fundamental and strategic, not only for follow-up and evaluation, but also for the development, consistency and depth of this process towards the achievement of gender equality.

I have the honour to announce that, on instructions from Her Excellency the President of the Republic, Mrs. Mireya Moscoso, and on behalf of the State of Panama, at 3 p.m. today I will be signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, thereby forging ahead towards equality, development and peace for the women of the world.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Mathabiso Lepono, Minister for Environment, Gender and Youth Affairs of Lesotho.

Mrs. Lepono (Lesotho): I am acutely aware of your injunction, Mr. President, that we limit our statements to seven minutes. I will try to abide by your injunction in making my statement. I have, therefore, prepared a longer statement which has been distributed to all delegations.

My delegation would like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Government of Lesotho reaffirms is commitment to the goals and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, namely, equality, development and peace.

In order to advance towards the attainment of these goals and objectives, the Government established, in 1998, the Ministry of Environment, Gender and Youth Affairs, whose main function is to coordinate and facilitate all gender issues and to

promote gender equality. While several obstacles have impeded the attainment of the goals that the Government set for itself, there have, nevertheless, been some remarkable achievements.

The Government of Lesotho has taken steps to put in place mechanisms that will improve the situation of women in Lesotho. First and foremost, a multidisciplinary national steering committee on gender, which was established to prepare for the Beijing Conference, is still operational. The committee has been reviewing a draft gender and development policy which addresses gender disparities in the country. The draft policy would make it mandatory for all line ministries and non-governmental organizations to have gender focal points for mainstreaming gender issues.

The Government has also established a human rights unit under the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Rehabilitation. This unit works closely with other Government ministries, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Children's Fund, in the promotion and dissemination of information on the human rights of women and children.

The establishment of the Law Reform Commission in 1993 was a milestone in the promotion and protection of human rights in Lesotho. The mandate of the Commission includes the review of all laws which discriminate on the basis of gender. I am pleased to inform this special session that the Commission has produced a draft Married Persons Equality Bill, 2000, whose objective is to abolish all laws that accord all marital power to the husband over the person and property of his wife. The bill would also seek to remove all restrictions on the legal capacity of a wife.

In January 2000, the Government of Lesotho also established a commission of inquiry into land practices — the Land Policy Review Commission — to consider, among other objectives, the present inheritance system and recommend suitable and equitable laws for the inheritance of land and to recommend a national land policy.

As one of the least developed countries, Lesotho has given top priority to poverty alleviation. The commitment of the Government to this goal has been confirmed by its production, in March 1996, of an action plan entitled "Pathways Out of Poverty". The main thrust of this approach is decentralization of decision-making, resources and planning.

Another major achievement in the Government's efforts to alleviate poverty was the establishment of the Lesotho Fund for Community Development, which was set up after extensive consultations with key stakeholders at various levels. Poverty-relief measures under the Fund are supplemented by a country-wide public works programme. This programme creates employment opportunities in the rural areas and also serves to improve the rural infrastructure.

Another major goal of the Lesotho Government has been the attainment of health for all citizens. The health and social welfare sector development plan for the period 1995 to 2000 advocates an integrated approach to the delivery of all health services, including maternal and child health care, and health planning.

Lesotho has witnessed a decrease in infant mortality rates as a result of improvements in primary health-care programmes such as immunization, control of diarrhoea and improved access to water and sanitation.

The Government of Lesotho, in close collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund, initiated a programme which consists of three closely linked subprogrammes dealing with reproductive health, population and family life education, and advocacy. Some schools have included components of population and family life education in their curriculum, and primary school pupils are also taught about AIDS.

In its efforts to address reproductive health issues, the Government has also established the Population Subvention Fund, whose purpose is to fund non-governmental organizations dealing with population-related activities. Furthermore, in October 1999, the Government adopted the national youth policy, which set out to protect the health and welfare of young people.

Although constituting the majority of the population at 51 per cent and being generally better educated than men, women nevertheless continue to be marginalized at the higher levels of decision-making. Some progress has, however, been made since the restoration of democracy in 1993. Since then, the following achievements are noteworthy. For the first

time in the history of Lesotho, a woman was elected Speaker of the National Assembly. A woman has been appointed as a judge of the High Court. There are currently four women who are civil service heads of Government ministries, some of them key ministries, where previously there was never more than one at any time. At this juncture, I should like to cite these ministries: the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Economic Planning, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Various forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence, incest, rape and sexual harassment, take place in Lesotho. Recently, there has been an alarming escalation in the number of rape cases and the rate of incest is also high. A number of non-governmental organizations and government agencies are engaged in counselling and assisting victims and survivors of violence. One of these agencies runs victim support programmes and renders legal advice to abused women.

In Lesotho, primary and secondary school enrolment rates have always been higher for girls than for boys. Interventions in education, therefore, have a significant impact on the empowerment of women. Lesotho is currently in the midst of major educational reform consisting of a complete transformation and revitalization of the entire education system.

In its endeavour to improve the quality and efficiency of primary education, the Government, in November 1999, announced a plan for free primary education from January 2000. The plan's implementation commenced in January this year with free education for pupils in the first year of school. Guidance and counselling, which are important for the education and development of girls, have been integrated into primary and secondary school curriculums.

There is a heightened awareness of the role of the media in disseminating information on gender. A number of female journalists regularly write articles on gender issues and their articles, being written in the local language, reach a large segment of the population.

In 1996, immediately after the Beijing Conference, the Government adopted the National Environment Policy, which also addresses gender issues. A study on the integration of gender in the implementation of Agenda 21, with reference to natural resources in Lesotho, was also undertaken in 1998.

Despite notable achievements made, the Government of Lesotho faces the following constraints: the coexistence of two legal systems, namely, the common law and customary law; provisions of our Constitution, particularly those relating to customary law, the law of persons and the devolution of property after death, which permit discrimination against women; inadequate human, financial and material resources; and persistent stereotypes regarding the social roles played by men and women in society.

The Government of Lesotho reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and commits itself, among other things, to accelerating the review and repeal of laws which discriminate against women; to accelerating the decentralization of the decision-making powers to local authorities in order to enhance the speedy and effective participation of women and the implementation of programmes and plans at the grass-roots level; to promoting advocacy and lobbying for an increase in women's participation and representation in Parliament and at all levels of decision-making; and, finally, to accelerating the incorporation of the principles set forth in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women into the domestic laws of Lesotho.

It is our sincere hope that the General Assembly at this special session will adopt a document that will accelerate the attainment of the goals of gender equality, development and peace.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Nonie Mathieu, Minister for the Status and Rights of Women of Haiti.

Mrs. Mathieu (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to convey the greetings of our Head of State, Mr. René Préval, and of the Government of the Republic of Haiti, as well as their good wishes for the full success of this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. These greetings and wishes are shared by the people of Haiti, in particular the 4 million women and girls who aspire to improved living conditions.

The Government that I represent here appreciates the efforts made by the United Nations in the noble aim

of promoting the full development of men and women on this planet in equal rights and peace.

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. The scope and systematic analysis of the theme of the status of women at the Conference made that meeting a milestone in women's search for equity and justice. That Conference also constituted a recognition of the struggle of women and a full acknowledgement of their new status at the international level.

The presence of the Haitian delegation at this twenty-third special session is essentially justified by the need to submit to this Assembly some illustrations of the action undertaken by our country in the framework of its post-Beijing plan of action. These illustrations also demonstrate our resolve to learn from the experiences of the struggle of women from other countries who are present here, while adapting them organically to our specific conditions and identity.

For us, post-Beijing falls into three parts: national commitments, the action programme and achievements. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Rights, the Haitian Government adopted a global policy on behalf of women, set forth in a declaration of 26 May 1996 that was signed by all ministers of that time. An inter-ministerial committee was established to coordinate action on the status of women included in sectoral action programmes.

With these government commitments behind it, the Ministry for the Status of Women and Women's Rights, together with women's organizations and civil society, has given priority to six themes set at Beijing. As a result, we drafted a post-Beijing national plan for action centred on three main areas of intervention: the struggle against poverty and for the promotion of women's empowerment; standard-setting and juridical-legal action; and awareness-raising and advocacy. Concerning the first area of intervention — the struggle against poverty and the promotion of women's empowerment — the themes selected are women and education, women and poverty and women and health.

Despite all kinds of constraints, the Haitian Government and non-governmental organizations involved in the fight to improve women's living conditions, helped by certain international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), are satisfied at having undertaken actions which, when analysed, have helped certain families confront many problems. For example, those related to schooling for young girls and to single-parent families headed by women have been given precedence.

It is clear that unless progress is pursued according to the specific plan, then the practice of my country, according to which girls' place is in the home, devoted to domestic work, while all boys are naturally destined to attend school, will lead to resorting to an old injustice that dates back to the beginning of Haitian society. Moreover, under the impetus of the Ministry for the Status of Women and Women's Rights, a national committee for girls' education has been established, responsible for conducting research on discrimination and gender inequity in the school environment.

On the economic level, the Government and the institutions involved in the struggle against the poverty of women have encouraged, for everyone's participation, a microcredit policy for women, particularly for rural women. About 3,000 women have already benefited from this pilot project, which is gradually being extended to cover all regions of the country. In the next five years, the Government intends to reach a female population of about 1 million. If we consider the dominant role played by Haitian women in the economy, in particular in the subsistence economy, this microcredit policy, with its fallout, gives rise to great hope for a better living environment, especially in the rural environment.

An equally fortunate initiative of the Ministry has been the establishment of an inquiry, with the support of UNFPA and the Haitian Institute for Statistics and Data Processing, into the impact of the law on voluntary resignation and early retirement by women who are heads of households working in the civil service.

In the area of health, a training programme has been established for midwives. This will help alleviate the shortage of doctors in remote areas and reduce maternal and infant mortality rates.

We should also point out that, in the implementation of the Beijing recommendations, the institutions concerned have been encouraging women's access to family-planning information services, that is, by about 13 per cent of women, while 62 per cent show the need for information and to plan their pregnancies.

Furthermore, we have a health education programme, which includes reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention and the prevention of sexually communicable diseases.

As part of the effort made by the Haitian State and other sectors of civil society, in-depth studies have been undertaken in order to make the necessary adjustments in Haitian legislation. Ad hoc committees have been set up for this purpose. New laws and amended legislation have been drafted and forwarded to the Haitian Parliament. These include the draft bills on rape and sexual abuse, on domestic violence and on responsible fatherhood, as well as amendments to the discriminatory articles in the adultery sections of the Haitian penal code. The early introduction of a new Parliament will certainly offer legislators the opportunity to look further into this legislation.

Regarding the area of intervention I described as awareness-raising and advocacy, media campaigns have been launched on the violence against women, gender equality, widespread diffusion of the Belem do Pará Convention, women in our history, etc. The national report, presented at the Beijing +5 Conference, provided a thorough survey of the actions of the Republic of Haiti, taken in accordance with the recommendations of the Beijing Conference and the commitments freely undertaken by the Haitian State.

Unfortunately, we have been able to achieve only a modest part of the action envisaged in these ambitious plans. The context of political and institutional crises and the worsening of socio-economic conditions of the population and of women linked to natural causes have contributed to limiting the Government's margin of operation and have handicapped the implementation of the post-Beijing national plan for action. Nevertheless, we wish to call attention to the fact that, despite the relatively modest gains we have achieved, we can feel satisfaction at contributing constructively to the work on behalf of women. We express our satisfaction at having endowed the country with a Ministry for the Status of Women and Women's Rights one year before the Beijing Conference.

Finally, we bring to this forum the strong determination of the Haitian people, especially of women, who represent more than 52 per cent of the population, to struggle for the liberty, dignity and equality of citizens. We bring a broader and sharper awareness of women and their need for equity with men, thanks to the combativeness they have shown over a period of 200 years in their struggle against slavery, authoritarianism and dictatorship. Famous women throughout our history have been there to witness that.

To you, dear delegates, who have come from all over the world to invigorate our struggle, I would like to offer my delegation's congratulations and those of the Government and the people of Haiti. I invite you to carry on this struggle with the same passion and dedication, because gender equity is a sine qua non of any development and lasting peace in the world in which we live.

The President: I call on Her Excellency Mrs. Baba-Moussa, Minister for Social Protection and the Family of Women of Benin.

Mrs. Baba-Moussa (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Benin, which is represented at this great and historic forum by a delegation of 35 members, first and foremost I wish to express to you our heartfelt congratulations for the skilful manner in which you are guiding our work.

Benin's commitment to advance the status of women does not end when the conferences do; it has been a tangible reality since Beijing. In order to implement this commitment, my country decided to create institutional mechanisms that can translate into reality the historical decisions taken at Beijing.

These mechanisms have included the creation, in 1996, of a department on the status of women, which in 1998 became the Ministry for Social Protection and the Family; the establishment of a Beijing national plan of action in the rural sector and the implementation of a follow-up mechanism; and the adoption in May 1996 of a declaration on population policy in the Republic of Benin and of a development strategy policy for the environmental sector for the period 1997-2000.

In the last few years there have been important breakthroughs affecting the legal and social status of women, namely bills that are now before the National Assembly. These include a bill on the voluntary interruption of pregnancy; a bill on female genital mutilation; and a bill on a code for individuals and families.

In the area of education, Benin is providing free schooling to rural girls whose parents cannot afford the fees. The percentage of girls enrolled in school has risen from 46.8 per cent in 1994 to 59.71 per cent today; this represents a significant increase. These results were achieved thanks to the joint efforts of State structures and non-governmental organizations, with the support of our development partners.

The literacy rate among women is on the rise, according to the results we have obtained in the last four years. Indeed, the number of literate women rose from 4,985 to 9,185 today.

The major obstacle encountered by women who wish to learn to read is still poverty. They have to work in the fields, go the well, go to the market, and feed their husbands and children. These poor women have so much to do. But the women of Benin, modern-day Amazons, are continuing the struggle. We must support them.

In the health sector, several projects have been implemented that benefit women, particularly in the area of reproductive health. These include maternity programmes aimed at minimizing the risks associated with pregnancy; a comprehensive reproductive health programme for young people; and a never-ending struggle against HIV/AIDS, which is depriving us of valuable human resources.

Girls have also benefited from efforts to protect them against the most dangerous childhood diseases and to put an end to the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation. Benin considers the trafficking of children — a result of extreme poverty — to be modern-day slavery, and the Government and people are fighting it with determination. We will not allow this to happen again in our country. Today we even have a hotline to report violations of the rights of children.

There is still much to be done to ensure a truly happy childhood for all, as new strategies are evolving in the area of the trafficking of children. We are counting on the support of the international community to help us to build a monitoring centre in Benin to help us eradicate this scourge.

As concerns the economic promotion of women, several microcredit institutions have been created to give women's organizations access to credit. Despite these efforts, however, poverty has not been alleviated. The underlying reasons include illiteracy; the overburdening of women with domestic tasks; the low profitability of economic activities; the lack of outlets for trade; and the lack of management training.

Women must become more involved in activities relating to the protection of the environment. In the context of armed conflicts, several State structures and non-governmental organizations are carrying out social mobilization and awareness-raising campaigns in order to eradicate practices that are harmful to women.

Our country, which believes strongly in the importance of hospitality and solidarity, is taking in, without any discrimination, refugees from all friendly countries. Women and children represent the majority of these people, who are coexisting with local populations. It was in this spirit that Benin opened a shelter in Kpomasse, with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Benin has encountered a number of difficulties in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We cannot but acknowledge that not everything is going well.

The participation of women in decision-making processes is meeting with resistance due to a great extent to past traditions and customs, but also because women are reluctant to tackle these obstacles. Today, of 83 deputies, only 5 are women. There are only 2 women in Government, out of a total of 20 people, and only 2 of the 7 members of the Constitutional Court are women. I am pleased to note, however, that the Court's President is a woman. The Economic and Social Council includes only 2 women on its staff of 30 members. But the process has begun, and we must support it.

Furthermore, 26.8 per cent of civil servants are women, of which 14.1 per cent are executives, and three of Benin's 100-plus political parties are headed by women.

On the other hand, many women are at the helm of non-governmental organizations or associations. They are very active in the field, helping poverty-stricken people.

I wish to pay a well-deserved tribute to all of these women.

The foreign debt represents a real obstacle to the implementation of a policy for the effective economic promotion of women in our country, and poverty in Benin tends to have a female face. This cannot be changed unless women are given greater access to credit in both rural and urban environments.

I believe that gender equality cannot become a reality without a profound transformation in the mindsets of both men and women in a new socio-economic environment, with everyone contributing his or her best to society.

In Benin, we are deploying every effort to consolidate the gains we have made in the educational field through information and communication. Aware of the importance of the advancement of women to the comprehensive and lasting development of our country, the Government is endeavouring to establish a national plan of action for the period 2000-2004.

Strengthened coordination of activities to advance the status of women and the inter-ministerial dialogue are essential in order to make headway in this lofty mission.

I am optimistic, however, because the results we have obtained in spite of our numerous socio-cultural difficulties have convinced me that we are on the right path.

On behalf of Benin, I undertake a commitment, before the international community, to continue working to effect the changes to which so many aspire.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Hawa Ahmed Youssouf, Vice-Minister, Office of the Prime Minister in charge of Advancement of Women, Family and Social Affairs of the Republic of Djibouti.

Mrs. Youssouf (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): it is a great source of satisfaction for me to have the opportunity to address this special session today on behalf of the Republic of Djibouti, its President, its Government and its people, and to convey my sincere congratulations.

Five years after the great gathering in Beijing, we are gathered here to take stock of what we have undertaken to do, each at his or her own level, to achieve our common objective and to explore ways and means of strengthening this process in the coming years. This is obviously a real opportunity and an important stage in the just and noble struggle for the liberation of women and the promotion of their status. The theme of this special session, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", is highly symbolic and offers great hope of seeing the year 2000 mark the beginning of a new shift in the approach to equality, development and peace with the seriousness and total commitment of all countries.

The Republic of Djibouti, which I have the honour to represent before the Assembly, has made the status of women one of the priorities of its development policy. The commitment of the Government to promoting a favourable environment for the promotion of women has been translated into specific measures. The most important advance at the national level has to do with the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to encourage the development of activities to benefit women. Upon assuming the highest office in the country, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Ismail Omar Guelleh, for the first time in the history of the country set up a ministry under the responsibility of the Prime Minister for the promotion of women, the well-being of the family and social affairs. In addition, and bearing in mind the multisectoral nature of the problems to be solved and the need to coordinate the actions taken by the various ministerial departments, a technical committee tasked with developing a national strategy plan of action has been set up by presidential decree. At the moment, that committee is working jointly with civil society.

In taking stock of the activities undertaken by the Government, I would mention the following: a national policy on family stability to provide access to quality services to improve the health and well-being of families in Djibouti; a training seminar on gender and development for the benefit of the inter-ministerial technical committee; draft legislation for a family code, to be finalized in a few months; and the Head of State Award to offer women an annual opportunity to take part in a national contest to select a prize-winner. A strategy is being developed to combat poverty and foster grass-roots development, which strategy will significantly improve people's access to basic social services such as education, health, drinking water and food. On the international level, the Republic of Djibouti has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The

new Djibouti penal code has incorporated provisions on domestic violence, genital mutilation, and rape, which is now a crime.

The Government's policy for the promotion of women has consisted in expanding education for girls so as to promote women's literacy and their effective participation in public life and to foster their access to economic resources. Moreover, in order to support this trend, women have entered the Government in Djibouti in high-level decision-making posts in administration, public bodies and the private sector.

Women in Djibouti are particularly active in the movement to organize in such diverse fields as those relating to the promotion of the family, craftsmanship, agriculture, the environment and the issue of genital mutilation. This movement is working to promote women and has the support of my department.

Turning towards the future, in the area of education we have organized general conferences to carry out an overall reform of the educational system and to support efforts at enabling girls to stay in school and to complete their studies. Encouraging young girls to seek training and achieve functional literacy are promising steps that will enable women to find better inroads into working life. It is in that spirit that the Government has set up, together with the African Development Bank, the social development funds programme to fund individual projects and income-generating activities.

In the area of improving maternal health and the health of children, my department is working closely with the Ministry of Public Health to take appropriate measures to help the community create reception centres to allow women to better manage their pregnancies and give birth under good conditions, and to combat AIDS and all other diseases impacting upon the economic activities of women and of society in general. To this end we are working with non-governmental organizations and associations to intensify efforts with regard to raising awareness, prevention and health education activities aimed at protecting the health of adolescent boys and girls.

On the cultural front we spare no efforts to create an awareness of the abilities and talents of women and girls and to encourage young girls to train for regional and international sports competitions.

With regard to the participation of women in political life, a remarkable breakthrough has been made by women in the central committee and in the various other deliberative bodies of political parties. The Ministry supports and encourages the participation of women in political life and believes they should no longer be seen as being more or less passive recipients of decisions and that they should become fully fledged actors in political, economic and social life.

With regard to peacekeeping in the subregion, I would like to mention the peace plan for Somalia developed by the President of the Republic on his assumption of the presidency. A little over a month ago, the Republic of Djibouti hosted a conference on reconciliation for the people of Somalia in order to enable them to find together a solution to the problems that have torn that population apart for over 10 years. It is from that perspective that women in Djibouti are helping their sisters and making available to them all the necessary financial and human resources they need to re-establish peace in their country.

These are the major achievements of my country since the holding of the Beijing Conference. These accomplishments are evidence of the interest of my Government in the promotion of women, development and peace. But all these programmes to benefit women and implement the Beijing Platform for Action require substantial resources that are generally beyond our grasp and that of African countries in general, especially in this period of crisis, drought and structural adjustment programmes. It if for this reason that we call upon the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and our other development partners to support our efforts through increased backing adapted to the individual characteristics and needs of each country.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ernest Petrič, Chairman of the delegation of Slovenia.

Mr. Petrič (Slovenia): It is an honour and pleasure for me to address this forum on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. Slovenia has also associated itself with the statement delivered by the Minister of Portugal, who spoke on behalf of the European Union on the first day of the special session.

This gathering provides us with a valuable opportunity to take stock of the progress made so far in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action,

which is the strongest commitment ever made by the international community to promote the empowerment of women. It also obliges us to identify obstacles encountered in the post-Beijing process of making gender equality a reality.

Five years ago, Slovenia joined other countries in Beijing in agreeing that the implementation of the Platform for Action requires commitment from Governments and the international community. By making this commitment we recognized the need to take priority action for the empowerment and advancement of women. We believe that we can look upon the achievements made so far with some pride.

Slovenia has reviewed all relevant laws and has integrated a number of special equality provisions into the most important parts of new legislation that is being prepared in accordance with Slovenia's aspiration to become a member of the European Union. New legal provisions guaranteeing human rights without discrimination on the basis of sex have been accompanied by the introduction of measures to make women aware of their rights. The Women's Policy Office, which has operated as a professional service of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia since 1992, has been developing enforcement mechanisms to ensure equality between women and men. These enforcement mechanisms will be introduced in the near future in special equal-opportunity legislation.

Slovenia attaches great importance to capacity-building for the empowerment of women, and to gender equality. An intersectoral governmental group has been set up; it is responsible for creating the mainstreaming policy plan and for preparing a mission statement to be issued by the Government, stating its intention to mainstream gender equality into all policies and programmes. Several actions to reconcile the professional and family life of women have also been formulated and have been proposed to the relevant ministries for their consideration and implementation.

Strong actions have been put in place in Slovenia since the Fourth World Conference on Women to confront various forms of violence against women and girls, to raise awareness about reproductive health and to secure equal opportunities for women and for men in the labour market. Particular attention is being given to rights in the area of labour relations and to possibilities for complaint in the event of violation of those rights.

The great majority of these activities have been carried out jointly with non-governmental organizations and other partners. Engaging civil society and creating deeper partnerships with women's organizations and other relevant actors are among the crucial, indispensable elements of translating into practice the political commitments and international obligations we have undertaken regarding the advancement of women and gender equality.

Perhaps the most important part of review processes such as this one is also recognizing the failures and shortcomings. Despite the fact that progress has undoubtedly been achieved in some areas and that the advancement of women is now firmly on our agenda, stereotypes and prejudices regarding the societal roles of women and of men persist. There are still too many problems facing women worldwide that call for stronger action and commitment.

For Slovenia, the lack of participation by women in politics remains one of the most visible obstacles on the road we still have to travel. Slovenia is among the countries that continue to have too low a representation of women in political decision-making bodies at all levels, although the problem has been addressed several times, both before and since the Beijing Conference. Political decisions and institutions matter. And women's participation and active involvement on all issues in every sphere of human activity matters too. Women's perspectives have to be acknowledged and accorded the weight they deserve. Women's experience needs to be utilized. Women's wisdom and talents have not yet been fully recognized and accorded the proper significance and impact. Without this, the goals of equality, peace and development cannot be achieved. Fortunately, there are many good examples to be followed, of countries which successfully broke the pattern of the under-representation of women, utilizing a variety of measures to ensure better power-sharing. The United Nations leads the way with an unprecedented number of women in senior and other policy-making positions.

The Beijing Platform for Action reaffirmed that women's rights are human rights. The most important international instrument for ensuring human rights and equality for women is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The principle of equality has to be complied with. remedies both on the national and the international levels need to be available to women who

have suffered discrimination. The adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention was a historic step in that direction. Slovenia signed the Optional Protocol when it was first opened for signature last year on Human Rights Day, and we are in the process of ratifying it.

This special session is but the continuation of a journey that started long before the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico in 1975. It led us through Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing to the threshold of a new millennium. Our goals remain the same: equality, development and peace. Let us use this opportunity to chart our course towards the future and to bring home, and to the women of the world, a meaningful outcome, a strong message and concrete results.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Alba Osores de Lanza, Special Envoy of the President of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay.

Ms. Osores de Lanza (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Uruguay welcomes the convening of this special session of the General Assembly and takes this opportunity to stress the importance of appraising the progress made since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing, and of identifying problems and trends that are affecting the full implementation of the Platform for Action adopted at that Conference.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Uruguay adopted legislation that was advanced for its time, recognizing and promoting women's rights. But in some spheres this has not been reflected, in practical terms, in a real process of gender equality in society. For instance, gender differences persist in employment with respect to hiring women and promoting them to higher positions. As for the wage differential, the gap has been closing in recent years: women's salaries are now 84.7 per cent of men's. At the same time, differences remain with respect to decision-making in the political, economic and social spheres.

Even though Uruguay has brought poverty and severe poverty rates down to 6 per cent and 1 per cent respectively, we are now facing the problem of the feminization of poverty, which principally affects women heads of household who are caring for children, even though in our country most households headed by women are above the poverty line.

Over the past five years, my country, which adopted the Beijing Platform for Action without reservations, has made important progress in most of the 12 critical areas of concern. To mention but a few examples, the literacy rate has risen to 97.3 per cent for women compared with 96.2 per cent for men. In tertiary education, women constitute some 63 per cent of enrolment. In the State university, the department of social sciences offers courses and seminars and conducts research on gender issues, something that began in the private universities. Gender issues are now a part of the training of secondary-school teachers.

In the health area, only 10 per cent of the female population lacks coverage, and the Ministry of Public Health has implemented programmes offering free care to all pregnant women irrespective of their socio-economic status. Since 1996 the Ministry of Public Health has been administering a programme for sexual and reproductive health, which includes a major family-planning component. An honorary advisory commission on sexual and reproductive health has been formed; among its other activities, it is studying and formulating standards on medical and ethical problems relating to assisted reproduction. At the same time, more than 94 per cent of births are taking place in institutions, in both the private and public systems; consequently the maternal mortality rate decreased to 19 per every 100,000 live births. Life expectancy at birth for women is 78 years of age, thus indicating the level of health of Uruguayan women.

Uruguay has a law on equal treatment and equal opportunity in the work space. Legal rules have been included on sexual harassment.

In our society, as in the rest of the world, there has always been violence against women. Our Government has become aware of this fact, which is considered as a violation of women's human rights. In the last few years, different actions have been encouraged in order to correct this situation. In 1995, the legal character of domestic violence was established and incorporated in the penal code. In practice, the implementation of this legislation has not been sufficient, and thus in 1998 an inter-institutional commission was created with the purpose of creating a national plan for prevention and for assistance to victims and drafting a new bill within the conceptual framework of the convention on the eradication of violence against women, adopted in 1996 at Belem do Pará within the framework of the Organization of

American States. This bill will be submitted for approval in the National Parliament.

Meanwhile, 13 women's bureaux were created in the Ministry of the Interior. At the level of the national office for the prevention of crime in the same Ministry, a specific area was also created on domestic violence, and through the police information management system we have a systematic, centralized registry of reports on this topic. Since last year, we have been developing a project, within the civilian safety programme, on public awareness and assistance for women who are victims of violence, through which three State organs and five non-governmental organizations coordinate their work.

Besides the achievements I have mentioned at the domestic level, the Government of Uruguay is aware of the importance of promoting the advancement of women, and it is absolutely convinced that there can be no justice, sustainable development or peace in the world without equal treatment and opportunity for men and women. That is why we also consider that in the reopening of the strategies of the multilateral financial institutions the social, human and developmental dimension should be taken into consideration so that the issue of women can also be incorporated. That is why the necessary link between structural adjustment policies and macroeconomic stabilization, with full respect for economic, social and cultural rights, should be such that financial institutions incorporate the concept of the right to development in their present and future strategies, but with a gender perspective. This would ensure an active role for women in development based on the principles of full and equitable participation in all spheres of society.

Uruguay is co-sponsoring the resolution in the Commission on Human Rights and in the General Assembly on the integration of women's rights in the entire United Nations system, as well as the resolution on the elimination of violence against women.

On 9 May of this year — and I say this with profound satisfaction — Uruguay signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At the regional level, in 1998 we created, within the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) system, a specialized meeting on women under the coordination of the National Institute of the Family and Women.

Uruguay has not come to this special session of the General Assembly merely to make an evaluation of the achievements and obstacles in the implementation of the world Platform for Action in our countries, which is truly important, because this is the first time that the Assembly is making an evaluation of this kind. Uruguay is present here to reaffirm its commitment to the building of a world of true solidarity, justice and democracy — but only if we achieve gender equality in all of our countries will we be able to attain our objective.

The President: I give the floor to Mrs. Luul Gebreab, President of the National Union of Eritrean Women.

Mrs. Gebreab (Eritrea): It is an honour, Mr. President, to attend the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly representing the State of Eritrea. On behalf of my delegation, I wish to congratulate you on your election as the President of this very special session. I also wish to thank my sister, Ms. Christine Kapalata, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, and members of her bureau for their considerable work during the preparatory process for this session.

Looking back on the five years which have elapsed since the historic 1995 Beijing Conference, one can say that there has been progress in the pursuit of justice and equality for women despite the lack of adequate resources and, in some cases, the lack of will of some Governments.

In Eritrea, which has been independent only since 1993, the steps taken to level the playing field have been impressive. In 1994 the National Assembly instituted a quota system which reserved 30 per cent of the seats in the Assembly for eligible female candidates. As the new nation embarked upon constitution-making, gender equity and the processes through which this ideal was pursued took up an enormous amount of time. Gender equity — as an objective embracing a number of interconnected issues dealing with constitutional guarantees, national, family, customary and religious laws, as well as social institutions, keeping up an ongoing and civil dialogue between conflicting members of society and between State and society — is no small achievement.

This process has been going on for Eritrea since independence. Eritrea's policies have been consistent with the internationally agreed-upon covenants and conventions designed to fight social and economic

injustices and to empower women to become active participants in their lives and in the destiny of their nation.

Since its independence, the State of Eritrea became a signatory to two international conventions intended to advance the position of women: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1993, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in 1997. In 1999, the State of Eritrea became a signatory to three more legal instruments: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

Eritrea's National Action Plan has prioritized education, training, health care, poverty eradication, human rights and the protection of the girl child. For the last decade, the National Union of Eritrean Women has been engaged in ensuring the visibility of gender issues and charting the path for the economic and political empowerment of present and future generations of Eritrean women. It has been involved in national, regional and local dialogues to bring about consensus on the need to address discriminatory social practices and shape the country's institutions in ways that are responsive to the needs of its women and children.

But we are all aware that it is not enough to sign laws. It is not enough to assert that women have equal rights under the law. Nor is it enough to undertake the daily battle against the physical and psychological violations that hamper the girl child at an early age so that her growth is stunted. A great deal more is required. What is required, first of all, is the political will of the Government to empower its female citizens; secondly, the economic resources that enable women to take their rightful place in society both as producers and reproducers; thirdly, the ability to nurture the vision of equality and the pursuit of social justice, so that all generations voluntarily renew their commitment to the privileges and obligations of equal citizenship; and fourthly, the requisite peace and stability which enable women's issues to be addressed at all levels of governance.

The current tragic war with neighbouring Ethiopia has deferred hopes for the rapid advancement of Eritrean women and children. The spectre of famine looms over both countries. While Beijing +5 gives us the opportunity to look into the achievements of the past decade, the current situation in the Horn should prompt us to identify areas that urgently require global attention.

The post-cold-war period has given us reasons for both hope and despair — hope, because the right to self-determination, whether for nations or individuals, has finally been recognized; and despair, because of the genocidal actions taken against those wishing to determine their own destiny. Inevitably, women and children have suffered enormously from these crimes.

Nevertheless, as the International Tribunals established in the aftermath of Rwanda and Bosnia demonstrated, where there is political will and moral principles, in the new millennium such crimes against humanity will not go unpunished. The international decision to underscore the ugliness of crimes against women and children is an indication that the world has begun to recognize that women's rights are human rights and that the violation of either should not be ignored. Thus, there is hope that in the future, international law may serve as a deterrent against crimes against women. But faith in international law and precedents can be misleading.

It is with great anguish that I inform this body that, as the current war between Eritrea and Ethiopia continues, unchecked by key actors in the international arena, so does the spiralling violence towards civilians in general and women in particular. Despite Eritrea's withdrawal from the disputed territories in May 2000 for the sake of peace, the conduct of Ethiopian soldiers throughout the areas they occupied inside Eritrea indicates that civilians in general, and women in particular, are under attack. The indiscriminate killing, plunder, looting and wanton destruction of Eritrean towns and villages occupied by Ethiopia's invading army has made 1.5 million people destitute in a matter of three weeks. This crime against the civilian population is continuing with impunity, even as I speak. As homemakers, women suffer the most. They are human beings, and their plight deserves the attention of the international community.

As Eritrean women, we salute the achievements of Beijing +5. As members of the global community, we would like to remind the world that silence in the face of crimes against women and children and against the sovereignty of small nations has triggered instability and wanton destruction. As women who

have found our voices in the twenty-first century, we would like to point out that complacency and contrived neutrality are no substitutes for a just and moral stand by the representatives of the international system.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Joan Musa, Special Envoy and Representative of the Prime Minister of Belize.

Mrs. Musa (Belize): Five years ago, countries of the world gathered in Beijing and put forward 12 critical areas of concern for the advancement of the world's women. The discussions, negotiations and agreements carried out during that historic meeting resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Today, as we review the progress made, we are called upon to identify new challenges, incorporate emerging issues and represent the concerns and interests of billions of women around the world who are hoping that from this special session will emerge greater empowerment and gender equality.

When Belize endorsed the guidelines put forward in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we as a nation committed ourselves to improving the lives of Belizean women. Today, I am pleased to report that there have been many achievements, and I take pleasure in sharing with the Assembly some of our ideas for moving towards gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.

As a developing nation, Belize recognizes the need for its women, who make up half of its population, to participate in every aspect of its growth and development. For the first time in the history of our young nation, a women's agenda was adopted as a crucial part of an electoral manifesto. This manifesto committed the current elected Government to take action on socio-political issues affecting women, promote their economic empowerment and address their legal status. The women's agenda has accelerated the implementation of our national, regional and international commitments to the advancement of women.

Belize, like the rest of the world, is aware that to achieve women's empowerment we must take into account the rapid changes in the global economy which have so far proven to be merciless to those who lack education, access to technology, capital and good physical and psychological health care — in short, the poor.

Today, 80 per cent of the world's population live in poverty. In Belize, the poor number almost one third of our total population. We owe it to them to exhaust all efforts to provide greater access to capital, education, health care and relevant technology — necessary tools for their emancipation. This is a challenge that must be undertaken for the development of all of our people.

The challenge to empower women begins with the girl child, who must be provided with a home where she is safe from all forms of abuse and be given the opportunity to go to school and provided with all relevant health and other support services which will help her to grow up to be a strong, confident woman.

Since 1995, violence against women, particularly family violence, has been one of the most prominent issues of concern among Belizean women. Studies conducted to assess the situation of violence against women emphasized the need to confront this issue from a multisectoral approach. This has led to a comprehensive plan to address family violence, which includes the implementation of several actions, from better training of police officers in domestic violence cases to improved management information systems in the areas of health, education and law enforcement. We realize that this is a work in progress, and our Women's Department, National Women's Commission and non-governmental organizations are continuing to work with the people of Belize to totally eradicate violence against women.

The future success of any developing nation begins with the availability of education. Through education, men and women learn essential skills needed to succeed in a productive society. In Belize, it is understood that both formal and informal education are essential to the empowerment of women. Thus, in addition to primary, secondary and tertiary school programmes, many skills training programmes are made available.

The health sector is another key factor in the achievement of equality and empowerment for women as they relate to their social and physical well-being. We realize that optimal health is required not only during the reproductive years but also through each stage of life. To this end, we have broadened our reproductive health services and drafted norms and

protocols in the provision of family planning. As part of our prevention strategy, our school health and physical education curricula now include lessons in human sexuality, gender relations and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

Although many women are the sole providers for their families, they continue to face an unfair economic system. Many women work long hours for unfair wages, due to a lack of skills, training and access to capital.

In Belize, governmental and non-governmental organizations have focused attention on providing skills training and offering affordable credit to women. Through our Government's Social Investment Fund and Small Farmers and Business Bank, a special window has been designated for women seeking loans. In 1999, 35 per cent of total loans issued by these institutions went to women.

We are encouraged by these modest achievements, but we are determined to do more. We recognize that our women must be involved in every aspect of decision-making, from the boardroom to the Cabinet room, from the Parent-Teachers Association to the trade unions. This is a sure way to meaningful development. Of course, we the developing nations cannot accomplish this alone. For sustainable growth and the eventual removal of huge numbers of women from the unrelenting grasp of poverty, we need the support and cooperation of our developed partners, who must recognize our vulnerabilities and work with us to develop more fair and equitable trade practices. We need to benefit from development assistance, shared technologies and scientific knowledge. Together, we can eliminate poverty from our planet.

Today, as we chronicle those achievements made since Beijing, we recognize the long journey before us. We know that much more must be done and commit our efforts to the development and implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy, with the intention of developing a gender policy that facilitates training and other important aspects of women's growth and development.

In his opening address to this special session, the Secretary-General stated that the old and new challenges facing today's women are part of the complex, interconnected world we now live in. They can be met only if we enable women to build on the best this new world has to offer, rather than condemn them to suffer. The latter cannot continue to be an option. And so, moved by this desire to build upon those commitments made in Beijing and with a new hope and vision for the future, let us renew our commitment to achieving gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century by empowering all humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Salma Abduljabbar, Counsellor of the General People's Congress of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mrs. Abduljabbar (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express to you, Sir, and to the members of the Bureau the satisfaction of my country's delegation with the manner in which you are managing the affairs of this special session of the General Assembly, which is, in fact, the first of the new millennium.

I would like also to thank Ms. Christine Kapalata of Tanzania, the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, members of the Bureau and all the representatives who have contributed to the preparations for the outcome of this meeting.

Five years have elapsed since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. A review on this occasion of the positive aspects of that important document reveals its most salient feature to be its remarkable contribution to increased awareness of women's issues. It has created an ever-growing momentum for taking serious and decisive measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and for ensuring that women enjoy equal rights and have access to all the necessary resources to improve the skills that can enhance their role in peace and development.

The past five years witnessed incessant efforts aimed at the implementation of the 12 areas of concern enumerated in the Beijing Platform for Action. However, despite all the achievements, we must recognize that the status of women in many countries has not improved to the point at which all the demands that were made can be said to have been fulfilled.

The renewal of our commitment to the goals and objectives set out in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women will always constitute the cornerstone of our future endeavours. Within this framework, efforts must be renewed to provide the resources necessary for the fulfilment of the

internationally agreed goals. We should work seriously to achieve universal accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. While my country's delegation commends the efforts made by the United Nations to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly in the field of reinforcing women's economic capabilities, we believe that the Organization must redouble its efforts to assist and support national and international endeavours aimed at the full accomplishment of all the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Guided by the teachings and provisions of the Holy Quran, which call for the liberation of human beings, women and men alike, from all forms of slavery and exploitation, and in application of *The Green Book*, which preaches that all inequitable and unjust relations in society must be eradicated, my country has adopted a number of measures designed to promote the advancement of women. We are now party to all international conventions on women. We have also established a multisectoral national commission entrusted with the follow-up of the decisions and recommendations adopted at Beijing. Numerous laws aimed at enforcing gender equality have been enacted. Under such legislation, all citizens enjoy equal rights. The Declaration of Women's Rights and Obligations in Jamahiriyan Society emphasizes that men and women enjoy equal rights without distinction.

One of the most remarkable gains achieved for Libyan women after the Beijing Conference in 1995 was the issuance by the General People's Congress of a document on women's rights and obligations in Jamahiriyan society, the society of the masses. This document states that a woman may exercise political authority through the General People's Congress and Committees; that she must defend her country; that she has the right to custody of her children and grandchildren; that she enjoys an independent financial status; that she is man's equal in assuming leadership positions; and that she is entitled to social security benefits pertaining to old age, disability, work injuries and illness.

In practical application of gender equality, women in the Jamahiriya have assumed important leading positions. In 1992, the position of Assistant Secretary for Women's Affairs was established at the Secretariat of the General People's Congress. This position is equal to the position of Assistant Speaker of Parliament in other countries. The Secretariat for Social Affairs has been established to deal with the welfare of women, children and the family.

For many years, Libyan women have enjoyed membership in the various General People's Committees at the rank of minister and have occupied positions that were long the monopoly of men, such as positions of leadership in the military and judiciary, as well as in the fields of politics and diplomacy. Women have also demonstrated remarkable success in the management of administrative affairs, in the production sectors and in business and professional practices. Furthermore, women can now travel freely inside and outside the country and can also represent their country in international and regional conferences and meetings.

In order to compensate Libyan women for the deprivation they suffered during the colonialist period and the backwardness that it caused, special attention is accorded to women, particularly in the health and education sectors. In this respect, numerous comprehensive projects have been developed to increase and enhance rural women's capabilities. Women also enjoy integrated health services, which include primary health care and specialized medical care offered to women during and after pregnancy. These services have led to a considerable reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates. Moreover, considerable success has been achieved by women at all levels of education — basic, secondary and post-secondary. Equal opportunities are also provided in the fields of higher and post-graduate education, while scholarships for higher studies are granted both inside and outside the country.

I have briefly reviewed the gains Libyan women have benefited from since the inception of the Great First of September Revolution. These achievements also fall within the scope of the Beijing Platform for Action. Although we are proud of our achievements, we must also confess that we have faced numerous obstacles. Some of these were bequeathed to us by colonialism, which spread ignorance and backwardness. There have been other obstacles which resulted from unilateral economic sanctions imposed on us by a super-Power for more than two decades, and the unjust sanctions to which Libya fell victim for approximately 10 years. These sanctions caused very extensive damage to all Libyan people, and particularly women, who constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in society.

I wish to acknowledge the Lebanese people, Lebanon's heroic women and the Lebanese resistance which forced the Zionist enemy to run away from Lebanon in defeat. We also wish to salute and congratulate the Palestinian and Syrian women, who confront Zionist aggression, and Iraqi women who face unjust sanctions and all women of the world, in order to achieve a world where love, peace, stability and justice will prevail.

In conclusion, I wish this gathering success in translating the Beijing decisions into action in order to achieve a better future for women in the new millennium.

The President: I call on Mr. Movses Abelian, Chairman of the delegation of Armenia.

Mr. Abelian (Armenia): The Beijing +5 review process coincides with the start of a new century — a timely moment to assess what has been done and what remains to be done within the movement to advance women's rights. The fact is that rights of millions of women continue to be denied year after year. The fundamental right to equality has been affirmed and reaffirmed repeatedly in conferences, yet women's equality must still be translated into reality.

We should realize that gender equality is not merely about numbers and equal participation, but it implies that women should no longer be regarded as a separate group in society and that their problems and requirements are an integral part of social and economic development as a whole.

The statements we have heard at this session prove that there is not yet a consensus on what could be a rights-based approach to dealing with some of the areas of concern.

Today, it is evident that all countries in the world — advanced, developing or transitional — will be substantially affected by globalization. The major tasks which Governments face today are the development and the pursuit of sound policies and appropriate structural adjustments to meet the challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities these new trends offer. Globalization has presented new challenges to women's economic and social rights. Inequality in economic and social rights makes women vulnerable and exacerbates still further the barriers to participation in public and political life.

Armenian legislation provides for equal rights for women and men, and there is hardly need for drastic legal reform. The real challenge is changing the mentality, bringing both men and women to a point where they realize that the place of women in society is far from limited to their roles in their families.

The "Basic principles of the plan of action for the improvement of the situation of women in Armenia for 1998-2000" of the Government of Armenia are targeted at the wider involvement of women at different levels of decision-making, assistance to female victims of violence, development of social networks for teenage girls, the elaboration of proposals aimed at the elimination of unemployment among women, and the creation of better working conditions for women. Through cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations, a pilot gender education programme was launched at two State and two private universities. Gender expertise in legislation guarantees gender sensitivity in laws and provides for active participation of non-governmental organizations in the formation of civil society.

Another important factor in the follow-up process is the dynamic development of the non-governmental organization network. Supportive policies and a favourable environment created by the Government enabled the registration of over 40 new non-governmental organizations dealing primarily with women's issues during the 5 years after Beijing. In 1998, the Armenian Parliament held special hearings on Beijing follow-up to determine the new priorities for the improvement of the situation of women.

However, alongside the measures being undertaken and despite the existing legal provisions, the situation in Armenia remains imperfect. As in many other countries, in Armenia the gap between de jure and de facto equality remains wide and has even worsened during the years of transition to a market economy. Women are under-represented in the Parliament, and no female member is included in the newly formed Cabinet. This is the reality of a country where women have been enjoying electoral rights since as early as 1918.

After independence, Armenia began implementing fundamental economic and political reform. As in most of the ex-Soviet countries, our economy has been strained by the changes following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and by transition

to the market economy. Yet Armenia had some peculiarities which have further aggravated the situation, namely the blockade of the main transportation routes and the consequences of the devastating earthquake of 1988.

It is now a well-established fact that women are most vulnerable to the hardships of economic crises, war or natural disaster. The armed conflict in Nagorno Karabakh has resulted in some 400,000 refugees moving to Armenia, a large number of whom are women and children. Refugee women and women in earthquake areas still have to carry the burden of everyday life and the problems of families, often in temporary dwellings with insufficient water and energy supplies.

The Government of Armenia has initiated a number of programmes aimed at assisting the refugees and residents of the disaster area, but the resources at its disposal are not adequate to meet their needs and solve all problems. Armenia still relies a lot on assistance from international organizations and individual countries.

Having experienced the consequences of armed conflict, we, maybe more than many, appreciate highly today's focus on women uniting for peace. It is especially important that women play a central role in the resolution of conflicts. Peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction must involve women, as representatives of both the State and civil society.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was the first forum where crucial links between the advancement of women and social progress around the world were most clearly elaborated. The Beijing Platform for Action highlighted the global nature of human rights issues concerning women and signalled a strong commitment on the part of Governments to international norms in gender equality. The challenge we face today is to build on the achievements of Beijing. We must move the agenda in practical ways, including reconsidering the national budgets to cover the commitments made in Beijing. We fully support the recommendations contained in the draft outcome document, to incorporate the gender-equality perspective into the budgetary process.

This year, as the time-frame for the implementation of the basic principles of the national plan of action expires, the Armenian Government, in cooperation with civil society, has committed itself to develop a solid national plan of action, based on the outcome of the present session, especially the reflection of the problems of countries with economies in transition in the outcome document.

It is our strong belief that only the concerted efforts of the Governments and the non-governmental organization community at the national, regional and global levels can effectively promote equality, development, peace and prosperity worldwide.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

I would like to inform delegations that we still have to listen to 53 speakers, starting this afternoon punctually at 3 p.m. The seven-minute rule will be strictly enforced for Member States, observer delegations and United Nations agencies, and the five-minute rule will be enforced for non-governmental organizations.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.